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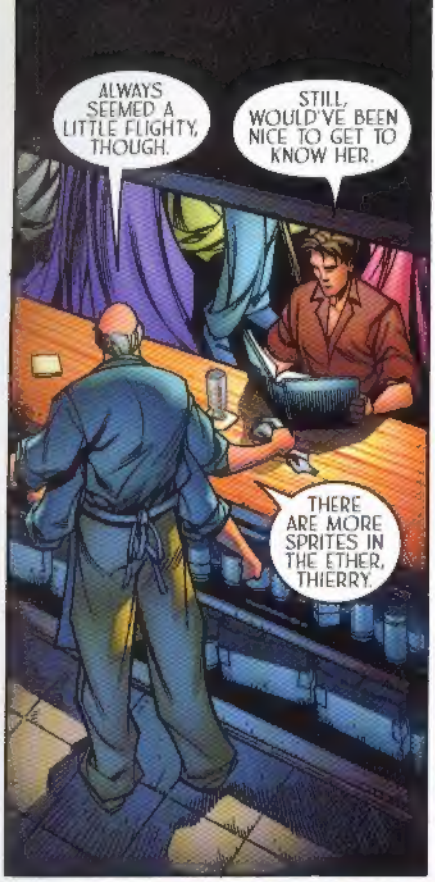
NOW THAT'S A NICE PIECE OF WORK.

I MEAN THE PICTURE, NOT THE...
SAME OLD SAME OLD. JUST ANOTHER NIGHT WITH THE USUAL CROWD.
YOU KNOW, *GISELLE* USED TO BE A REGULAR IN HERE, TOO. BUT IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE SEEN HER.

...WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, THIERRY.
I KNOW.
KIND OF A SHAME. DOUBT I'LL EVER SEE GISELLE *OR* HER SISTER AGAIN.
I GOT DRAWN INTO WHATEVER WAS GOING ON WITH THEM, THEN...
...*NOTHING*. PROBABLY BETTER OFF THAT WAY.
SO WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU, RICK?


ALWAYS SEEMED A LITTLE FLIGHTY, THOUGH.
STILL, WOULD'VE BEEN NICE TO GET TO KNOW HER.
THERE ARE MORE SPRITES IN THE ETHER, THIERRY.

THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY.
SHOULD'VE REALIZED SOMEONE LIKE HER AND SOMEONE LIKE ME DIDN'T STAND MUCH CHANCE OF CONNECTING.

I GUESS WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE EACH OTHER, RIGHT ALPHONSE?
ALP GROWF

OH WELL...
...I'LL JUST FIND ANOTHER SUBJECT TO PAINT.

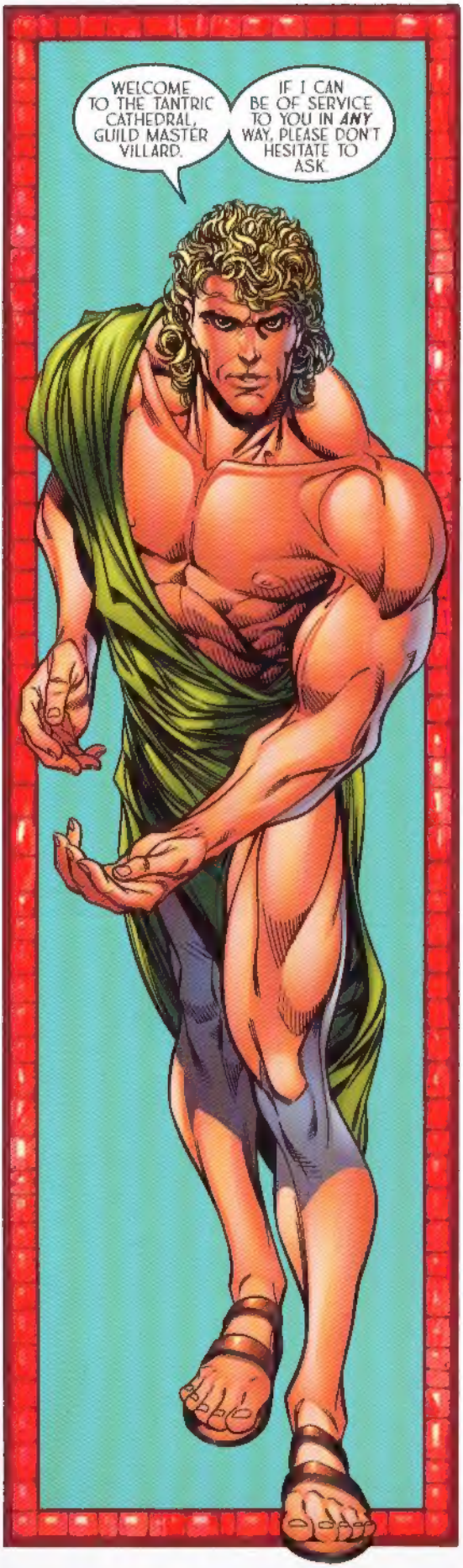
THIERRY?
I WAS HOPING I'D FIND YOU...
BRF?

...HERE?!
GISELLE!
WHOOP
SPLOSH
I'M SORRY...
...I'M SO SORRY...
...HERE, LET ME, I CAN TAKE CARE OF THAT...
...uh...
...I THOUGHT I COULD TAKE CARE OF...
...BUT MAYBE I...
...um...

IT'S OKAY, I DON'T NEED THAT.
SEE? GOOD AS NEW.
DON'T GIVE IT A SECOND THOUGHT.
SO...
...PRETTY BIG CROWD TONIGHT.
YEAH, THIS PLACE HAS REALLY BECOME A HANGOUT.
SUCH A GOOD BOY, AREN'T YOU? ALPHONSE, ISN'T IT?
YOU REMEMBERED. YOU HAVE A SQUIT, RIGHT? LEFT IT AT HOME?
NO, NOT AT HOME, EXACTLY.
THAT'S WHY I CAME, TRUTHFULLY— TO APOLOGIZE.
YOU WERE SO NICE TO ME, YOU TRIED TO LOOK AFTER ME, AND I DIDN'T...WELL, I DIDN'T TAKE THE TIME TO RETURN YOUR KINDNESS.
THERE WERE REASONS, BUT THAT'S NO EXCUSE. FOR WHATEVER IT'S WORTH...
...I'M SORRY.

APOLOGY ACCEPTED THEN.
WHAT ABOUT THAT GUY YOU WERE WITH? DARROW?
THAT DIDN'T WORK OUT. HE TURNED OUT TO BE...
...uh, TOO OLD FOR ME.
LOOK, THIERRY, I KNOW YOU HAVE NO REASON TO EVEN TALK TO ME, MUCH LESS BE MY FRIEND...
...OR ANYTHING ELSE...
...BUT I WAS HOPING WE COULD START FROM SCRATCH AND SEE WHERE THINGS GO.
YOU SEEM LIKE SUCH A NICE GUY, AND TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I'VE HAD MY SHARE OF PROBLEMS *FINDING* NICE GUYS.
OKAY...
...LOOK, DON'T TAKE THIS THE WRONG WAY, AND I'M NOT ASKING FOR AN EXPLANATION, BUT FOR WHATEVER REASON YOU *DID* ACT PRETTY WEIRD.
HOW CAN I BE SURE THAT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN AGAIN?
Ah.
THAT.
TO BE HONEST, I CAN'T GUARANTEE THINGS WON'T GET... *WEIRD*...ONCE IN A WHILE.
BECAUSE OF *THIS*. YOU WERE THERE JUST AFTER I GOT IT, REMEMBER?
RIGHT, BUT...WHAT IS IT?

I'M STILL NOT SURE WHERE IT CAME FROM, AND IT'S REALLY COMPLICATED MY LIFE.
BUT I'VE ACCEPTED IT AND I'M LEARNING TO LIVE WITH IT.
"LIVE WITH IT?" I'M NOT SURE WHAT THAT MEANS.
DOES IT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE NOUVEAU CATHEDRAL GETTING DESTROYED? I KNOW YOUR SISTER WAS NAMED GUILD MASTER.
THAT'S PART OF IT, BUT THERE'S MORE. IT'S—
IT WOULD BE EASIER FOR ME TO *SHOW* YOU. WOULD YOU MIND GOING SOMEWHERE WITH ME?
RIGHT NOW?
SURE...I GUESS SO. CAN ALPHONSE COME?
ALPHONSE CAN *ABSOLUTELY* COME.
SO WHERE ARE WE GOING?
THE MOON.


WELCOME TO THE TANTRIC CATHEDRAL, GUILD MASTER VILLARD.
IF I CAN BE OF SERVICE TO YOU IN *ANY* WAY, PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO ASK.

Uh, NO... I'M FINE, THANKS.
FINE.
BUT IF I THINK OF ANYTHING I'LL... BE SURE TO LET YOU KNOW.
PLEASE DO.

FOLLOW ME.
ALL THE OTHER MASTERS HAVE ARRIVED AND AWAIT YOU WITHIN THE INNER SANCTUM.

WE OF THE TANTRIC GUILD FIND IT BEST WHEN THERE IS A WILLINGNESS TO CONJOIN FROM ALL PARTIES INVOLVED.
I HOPE YOUR DISCUSSIONS ARE FRUITFUL.
THANK YOU, I HOPE SO AS WELL.

FASHIONABLY LATE, I SEE
FASHIONABLY LOST, VASHLA
BUT ONLY BRIEFLY
SERVERS ARE DISMISSED
PLEASE LEAVE US
ALL OF YOUR ACOLYTES SEEM TO BE SUCH
HEALTHY
SPECIMENS

THEN I'M GLAD YOU FOUND YOUR WAY. WE SHOULD BEGIN.
WE OF THE TANTRIC TAKE *PRIDE* IN OUR *OWN* BODIES AND *PLEASURE* IN THOSE OF OTHERS.
OBVIOUSLY.
THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING THIS TO TAKE PLACE HERE. THE NOUVEAU CATHEDRAL IS STILL A PILE OF RUBBLE. UNFORTUNATELY
THIS WAS THE ONLY SITE UPON WHICH ALL SEVEN OF US COULD AGREE.
PLEASE SIT.
A SHREWD TACTIC. MAKING US *WAIT* FOR YOU. GENEVIEVE. PERHAPS YOU HAVE THE MAKINGS OF A GUILD MASTER AFTER ALL.
AND PERHAPS YOU ASCRIBE TO ME DUPLICITY TO WHICH *YOU* WOULD BE MORE PRONE, MAGUS.

WE'RE ALL AWARE OF WHY WE'RE HERE
SO YOU CAN FORCE AN UNPALATABLE COMPROMISE DOWN OUR THROATS
CALL IT WHATEVER YOU LIKE THE SITUATION IS WHAT IT IS
DESPITE YOUR EFFORTS, MY SISTER RETAINS THE ETERNAL SPIRITS. AND IT WILL REMAIN SO
BUT THE POPULATION NEED NOT KNOW
AN EQUAL? I SPEAK ON BEHALF OF MYSELF AS WELL AS MY SISTER AND I BELIEVE WE'VE ALREADY ESTABLISHED SHE WIELDS MORE POWER THAN ALL OF US COMBINED
YOU'LL OBEY THIS AGREEMENT JUST AS YOU'LL OBEY THE TRUCE YOU MADE WITH GISELLE BECAUSE YOU'VE NO OTHER CHOICE
WE'RE JOINED IN THIS RUSE BY OUR OWN CULPABILITY IF ONE LINK BREAKS WE ALL SUFFER
THERE WILL BE NO FURTHER ATTEMPTS AGAINST GISELLE. MY SISTER WILL MAKE NO MOVE AGAINST YOU. NOR WILL SHE REVEAL THE SECRET WE SHARE
I WISH TO POSSESS MY GUILD'S ETERNAL SPIRIT JUST AS ALL OF YOU DO. BUT THAT SEEMS UNLIKELY TO EVER HAPPEN
THEN WE'RE BOUND TOGETHER IN THIS?
MONDRU?
OF COURSE
VASHUA?
YES
ATYAAH?
YES

THE PEOPLE ARE IGNORANT THAT EACH OF US IS AN EMPTY VESSEL THEY WON'T KNOW THE TRUTH
BECAUSE THEY CAN'T KNOW THE TRUTH THE SECRET MUST NEVER BE REVEALED AND WE SEVEN MUST COMPEL EACH OTHER TO KEEP IT
WHAT RIGHT HAVE YOU TO MAKE DEMANDS?!
YOU ACT AS IF YOU'RE IN A POSITION TO DICTATE, RATHER THAN BEING ONE WHO'S BARELY AN EQUAL!
IT IS TIME WE DEVOTED OURSELVES TO RULING OUR DOMAINS RATHER THAN THIS INCESSANT SQUABBLING
PARTICULARLY NOW WHILE WE CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE POPULAR SUPPORT WE REAPED FROM ANMORAS' DEFEAT
ZAI?
AGREED
YINMA?
WHAT OTHER OPTION'S LEFT?
MAGUS?
YES, DAMN YOU
YES
GOOD

HATE YOU? NO. HE DOESN'T HATE YOU.
Whoops here she comes.
SO THIS IS IT
UH THIERRY? YOU OKAY?

IS THIS
Um
IS THIS WHAT I THINK THIS IS?
THE SANCTUM OF MASTERS?
YES
WELL ACTUALLY, IT DOESN'T BELONG TO THE MASTERS ANYMORE IT'S MINE NOW
TRUTHFULLY IT WASN'T EVEN THERS TO ORIGINALLY BELONGED TO ANIMORA
AND IT'S
YOURS
RIGHT MINE
YOURS
OKAY BY THE WAY UNIQUE DRESS
THANKS
THESE ARE KIND OF MY WORK CLOTHES
ALPHONSE DON'T START THAT AGAIN IT'S JUST A SQUAT
YOU'D THINK SO
GISELLE ARE YOU GOING TO TELL ME WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?
FROM THE BEGINNING?

YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND I WAS *NEVER* INTERESTED IN MAGIC THAT WAS MY SISTER'S THING. I WAS A LOT MORE CONCERNED WITH WHERE THE NEXT PARTY WAS
WHEN GEN WAS PICKED TO BE THE NEXT NOUVEAU GUILD MASTER, I WAS GLAD FOR HER SHE'D WORKED HER WHOLE LIFE FOR THAT CHANCE BUT IT DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO ME
DURING HER RITE OF ASCENSION SOMEONE CONGRATULATED ME. JUST SOME GUY WHO SHOOK MY HAND. BUT I GUESS HE DID MORE THAN THAT
BECAUSE NOT LONG AFTER, THIS *MARK* APPEARED ON MY PALM AND SOMEHOW
THIS PART YOU HAVE TO KEEP SECRET
SOMEHOW IT ATTRACTED ALL THE ETERNAL SPIRITS INTO ME. THAT WAS RIGHT BEFORE YOU SAW ME BY THAT FOUNTAIN REMEMBER?
THE SPIRITS ARE STILL THERE. IT'S LIKE I COULDN'T GET RID OF THEM IF I WANTED TO
WHICH MEANS I'VE GOT ACCESS TO MORE MAGICAL POWER THAN ANYONE
EVER
YOU CAN IMAGINE GEN WAS LESS THAN HAPPY WITH ME, BUT SHE WAS THE LEAST OF MY PROBLEMS
I HAD TO DEAL WITH THE *OTHER* GUILD MASTERS. THAT SLIMEBALL DARROW ANIMORA
ALL THAT'S *OVER* NOW. EVERYTHING'S PRETTY MUCH BACK TO NORMAL

NORMAL MEANING I'M SUPPOSED TO BE THE MAGICAL PROTECTOR OF CIRESS
LOOK, IF THIS IS TOO WEIRD FOR YOU IT'S OKAY
I'LL BRING YOU BACK TO JAZZRAT'S OR WHEREVER YOU WANT TO GO
NO, I THINK I'M OKAY WITH IT I THINK
THEN YOU'LL STAY A LITTLE WHILE?
SURE I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
SORRY THE PLACE IS SUCH A MESS MY APARTMENT'S PROBABLY A LITTLE WORSE, IF YOU CAN BELIEVE IT
I REALLY NEED TO CLEAN ALL THIS UP AND FIGURE OUT WHAT'S HERE, BUT
WELL, TIDINESS WAS NEVER MY FORTE
TRUTHFULLY, I HAVEN'T EVEN EXPLORED MOST OF IT WANT TO HAVE A LOOK AROUND WITH ME?
WITH THE MAGICAL PROTECTOR OF CIRESS TO KEEP ME SAFE
HOW CAN I REFUSE?
WE'RE GOING FOR A WALK YOU COMING?
Nah, too much effort. If it's all the same to you I'll stay here and make Aphonse nervous.
SUIT YOURSELF

THE SQUIT TALKS
...VE GOTTEN USED TO IT
BELIEVE ME WITH EVERYTHING ELSE THAT'S HAPPENED A TALKING SQUIT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE THAT BIG A DEAL ANYMORE
HANG ON I SHOULD AT LEAST TRY THIS UP
THIS MAGIC STUFF DOES HAVE ITS USES
SKRAKAKRAK
SHOULDN'T YOU JUST REBUILD THE NOUVEAU CATHEDRAL LIKE THAT?
PROBABLY
BUT I KNOW THAT'S SOMETHING GEN WANTS TO TAKE CARE OF HERSELF
SHE SEEMS LIKE YOUR SISTER IT'S OBVIOUS HOW MUCH SHE CARES ABOUT YOU!
GEN PRACTICALLY RAISED ME
OUR RELATIONSHIPS HAD ITS ROCKY PATCHES, BUT NOW IT'S THE BEST IT'S EVER BEEN

WOW.
WHAT IS IT?
WHO IS IT?
I'M NOT SURE. LIKE I SAID, I REALLY HAVEN'T HAD MUCH CHANCE TO EXPLORE THIS PLACE.
BUT IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE SOMETHING ANY OF THE MASTERS WOULD'VE HAD. YOU THINK MAYBE IT WAS ANIMORA'S?
IT'S BEAUTIFUL, WHOEVER IT BELONGED TO. THE CRAFT, THE AESTHETIC...
...EVERYTHING.
IT'S AN ARTISTIC EXPRESSION, NOT A MAGICAL ONE, YOU KNOW?

THAT'S REALLY WHY I BECAME AN ARTIST, SO I COULD CREATE *WITHOUT* MAGIC.
IT'S SO EASY TO CAST A SPELL OR LOOK UP AN INCANTATION, BUT I THINK THERE'S A FEELING OF...
...I DUNNO, *ACCOMPLISHMENT*, WHEN YOU DO SOMETHING YOURSELF, BY HAND.
LISTEN TO *ME* GOING ON. SORRY, I DON'T MEAN TO BORE YOU.
NO, NOT AT ALL.
DO YOU HAVE ANY OF YOUR WORK IN THERE?
ARE YOU ASKING...
...YOU MEAN YOU WANT TO *SEE* SOME?
OKAY, BUT THIS IS JUST A SKETCHBOOK, PEOPLE I'VE SEEN AROUND JAZZRAT'S.
I DID THEM FOR MYSELF, SO DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH.
WHY ARE YOU APOLOGIZING?
THEY'RE *WONDERFUL*.

Oh.
OOPS.
Uh...I WASN'T REALLY THINKING ABOUT THAT BEING IN THERE. I WAS SKETCHING FROM MEMORY.
I HOPE YOU'RE NOT *TOO* OFFENDED?
OFFENDED? I'M FLATTERED.
WELL, IN THAT CASE...
...I'M GLAD YOU LIKED IT.
I'M GLAD YOU DREW IT.
THIERRY, I'M GLAD YOU'RE *HERE*.

Come back here!
I was KIDDING!
I don't REALLY eat gorks...
...they're too stringy.
FTUMP
Oops...
...THIS can't be good.